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FAST-SERMON

PREACHED AT

FITZROY-CHAPEL,

On the 8th of FEBRUARY, 1782.

[PRICE ONE SHILLING]

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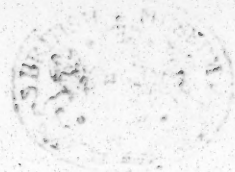
BEING THE DAY APPOINTED FOR

A GENERAL FAST.

By J. N. PUDDICOMBE, M.A.

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M.DCC.LXXXII.



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F A S T - S E R M O N.

P S A L M LI. 17.

THE SACRIFICES OF GOD ARE A BROKEN SPIRIT: A BROKEN AND A CONTRITE HEART, O GOD, THOU WILT NOT DESPISE.

THESE are words, which, if considered with the attention they deserve, could not fail of setting the selfish Great Man in a very contemptible point of view in his own eyes, and checking those flights of arrogance which he is so apt to indulge. To one wholly absorbed in the idea of his

his own importance, and whose good actions flow merely from ostentation and a desire of popular applause, humiliating indeed must be the reflection, that the costliest and most superb offerings which he can present to his Maker are to be far excelled by those of the man, whom if he vouchsafes to behold, it is with an eye of scorn and disdain; and that all his gold, his frankincense, and myrrh, are not half so acceptable in the sight of Him who is no respecter of persons, as the broken spirit and the contrite heart of the most indigent and obscure.

Such are the qualifications with which the Royal Psalmist tells us we must approach our Maker, if we would find favour in his sight. Nor is it he alone who insinuates their necessity and importance. In this, as in all other instances, we find an exact correspondence and mutual harmony between the sentiments of all the Sacred Writers. With a peculiar degree of sublimity the animated Prophet, Isaiah, introduces God addressing his chosen people, in consequence of a revolt ungrateful to excess, and which can admit of no palliation,
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in a strain tending to the same point: to what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? "I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts, and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hands to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations, incense is an abomination unto me, the new moons, and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with, it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting." And if we pursue our enquiries a little farther in the same chapter, we shall meet with a kind of commentary upon the words of the Psalmist, and what may serve as a full and sufficient illustration of his meaning. Circumstanced as we at present are, the verses here alluded to cannot fail of engaging the attention of the judicious and considerate in a very forcible and striking manner: "Wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." What else is this conduct
but

but the necessary effect of that broken and contrite heart which the King of Israel so powerfully recommends, by saying it is a sacrifice pleasing to the Most High. This is, indeed, a sacrifice, which, as delinquents that have forfeited his favour, we ought to offer him at all times; but on the present occasion it must be allowed to be peculiarly requisite and indispensable. Unanimously assembled as we are for that greatest and most important of all purposes, the endeavouring to propitiate that Awful Being whom we have offended, and to avert the lightning of his wrath from this dejected land, with what penitence, what submissive reverence, what unfeigned and heart-felt humiliation of ourselves, ought we to bend before the throne of grace!—Once happy land! but now how fallen! how changed! where is now that gracious interposition of His in thy behalf, by which of old thou wast so eminently distinguished above all the nations which surround thee? Even that favoured people, whom he rescued in so wonderful a manner from Egyptian tyranny and servitude, and led like a flock of sheep through the howling wilderness,

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ness, surrounded as it were with miracles and mercies, scarcely even they experienced a larger share of his protection and beneficence. How often has he made bare his almighty arm, that all the ends of the earth might be witnesses of the salvation which he brought upon thee! Reflect for a moment with becoming seriousness and attention upon the extraordinary instances of favour he has shewn thee; and in particular, remember at how early a period he communicated to thee the most eminent and desirable of all blessings, the Sacred Light of the Gospel. Consider what spacious and extensive tracts of the habitable world have not, even yet, seen the salutary dawning of its celestial beams, but remain totally immersed in ignorance and darkness. Think how miserable their situation for want of this invaluable advantage, and that such must inevitably have been thine, hadst thou likewise been destitute of it, had Heaven not made thee its peculiar care! Is there then a possibility of being too early, or too ardent, in thy acknowledgements for the unmerited preference given in this particular to thee?

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But not satisfied with barely irradiating that corner of the Globe which we inhabit with this Divine Light, how benevolently has he preserved it to this day in its native purity and lustre! Bigotry and barbarism in vain united their efforts to obscure and extinguish it. When Gothic darkness hung like an impenetrable cloud over the whole face of Christendom, and ignorance, the fruitful parent of superstition, had sullied the original brightness of our religion, by the introduction of such ceremonies as were closely allied to that state of Paganism, which, like an inundation, had once overwhelmed us, how graciously did he look down and compassionate the melancholy condition to which we were reduced! By his appointment a series of events so fortunately concurred, as to rescue us from that yoke of spiritual despotism and tyranny, which neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear. From this confused and gloomy chaos arose new light and order. The great system of Christianity was placed upon so reformed a foundation, as prepared the way for that purity and majestic simplicity in which it is now professed among us.

Surely

Surely the candid and ingenuous heart cannot fail of being touched with sentiments of profound and ardent gratitude at the mention of such beneficence. But how will this gratitude be heightened by the reflection, that what is recorded above, is but a small extract from that great catalogue of the Divine Blessings which the faithful page of history has transmitted to posterity! How cheerful and bright a prospect does it present before us! in how ample a field invite us to expatiate!

But how sensibly must it affect the considerate and feeling mind to see the smiling scene so lamentably reversed! If we look around us, we behold advancing fast a fullen and gloomy cloud, big with the tempest, ready to break forth. In consequence of our insensibility to his daily-repeated mercies, the God of our fathers seems in some measure to have withdrawn the light of his countenance from us. The nations who beheld us with envy and amazement as objects of his singular and continual regard, envy us no longer. Those who once trembled at our very name, cry out in a triumphant and insulting strain, Where is

now their God? Nor here let the petulant and impatient breathe out the least murmur or complaint. Let them, on the contrary, suppress every thought which has the most distant tendency that way. What foundation have they for complaint, who have spurned the goodness of their Almighty Protector, and obstinately fled from his paternal arms while he stretched them forth for their reception? He has vouchsafed to intreat them with many a gentle, many an indulgent call, to hide themselves under the shelter of his wings, and only make that return, to which, as their Great Father and Preserver, he is so justly entitled. But ah! too true it is, that we have been deaf to his solicitations, and regardless of his mercies. Yet, to swell their number still, he has not been sparing of those notices, which have usually been the forerunners of great events in the course of this world, and actually did precede the destruction of Jerusalem: such were wars, and rumours of wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places. How striking a warning was lately afforded us in the overthrow of the unfortunate islands with which we were connected by so many
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tender bonds, and whose lamentable fate is fresh in the memory of all! Notwithstanding all which, it is greatly to be feared, that there is too much reason for applying to this land the pathetic address which our Saviour makes to the devoted city, which, although a continual witness of the mighty miracles he wrought, yet persisted in its incredulity and impenitence: O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

It must be evident, at first sight, to the discerning part of mankind, that we are at present involved in a situation out of which nothing less than a hand Omnipotent can extricate us. Closely surrounded as we are with foes, to Heaven alone ought we to apply for succour. Whither shall we fly for protection here, when those whom we thought our friends, some of whom in a great measure owe their political existence to this country, are at this moment leagued against it in such a combination, as nothing but consummate perfidy, in concurrence with the most atrocious and
inveterate

inveterate rancour, could have suggested? It may be said, that what the ancient poets fabled of Justice, in their iron age, is now realized of Peace; which seems to have abandoned us in such a manner as if it never intended to visit us again. But what must give the greatest pain of all to the breast of sensibility, is the reflection, that our relations and countrymen themselves are become our implacable and severest enemies. To them we have given no cause for such vehement exertions of enmity, bitterness, and cruelty; but, on the contrary, the weightiest and most powerful inducements to be our friends for ever. Intimately united with us as they were by the ties of blood, of gratitude, of national love, and of religious opinion, they have not blushed to burst them all asunder, in opposition to every law, both human and divine. Capable of such a conduct, is it matter of surprize that they have since stained their name with actions too shocking to the ear of humanity to admit of a recital?

So unjustifiable and unnatural a desertion recalls to memory the complaint which the wisest
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of men so feelingly makes of the ingratitude and treachery of him who called himself his friend : It is not, says he, an open enemy that hath done me this dishonour, for then I could have borne it : neither was it mine adversary that did magnify himself against me, for then, peradventure, I would have hid myself from him. But it was even thou, my companion, my guide, and mine own familiar friend. We took sweet counsel together, and walked in the house of God as friends.

Since then we have experienced such malevolence and undeserved treatment below, let us look up to that all-pitying Power from whom alone cometh salvation : let us seek for refuge under the shadow of the Almighty wings, until this tyranny be overpast. If by the unfeigned and constant supplications of an humble and contrite spirit we can but render Him propitious to our cause, we need not fear what man can do against us. But in order to qualify us for imploring His assistance, we must first submit our conduct to an impartial scrutiny, and diligently rectify every fault, every impropriety which occurs, according to that perfect

fect plan which his Sacred Word holds out before us. Let us acknowledge our transgressions, prostrating ourselves, under the profoundest sense of our unworthiness, at the footstool of that Gracious Being whose ears are always open to the cries of the penitent and afflicted. Thus prepared for entreating the interposition of our God, let us presume, with an holy and submissive confidence, to solicit his aid, firmly persuaded that He is the only proper object of our reliance, and that all support but what descends from Him is ineffectual. Then may we hope, that every attempt of our deliberate and cruel enemies, of our more cruel and treacherous brethren, will be rendered abortive, and their heads be crowned with shame and confusion. Then, and then only, may we hope that the all-enlivening Sun of Righteousness will arise full upon us, with healing and protection in his wings.

With the laudable view of promoting this pious inspection into our behaviour, and humble application to the King of kings, was the present day set apart by those in authority over us; and this
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design it is our duty to advance. The Almighty Himself has told us, in the language of his Prophet, that, in order to render this an acceptable day to Him, it is requisite, not to bow down the head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under us, but to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free; to deal our bread to the hungry, and receive the poor that are cast out.

This is the Fast which he informs us he has chosen. Only in conjunction with these actions, can the present obtain his approbation. Then let us not be deficient in a single circumstance of what he requires. And while we endeavour to execute his will in this particular, let us not forget to offer up the hymn of praise for that clemency which he has shewn, in not employing all the instruments of his anger at once against us. For ever blessed be his Great Name! in the midst of judgement he remembers mercy, and has not given us over entirely unto death. The fertilizing showers have not refused to fall in due season; nor has the earth failed to scatter forth her

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fruits from her teeming bosom. The atmosphere we breathe in is not impregnated with disease and death; nor are pestilence and famine suffered to brandish their tremendous scourge over our heads, and fill our land with desolation and terror.

For so unmerited an instance of lenity and goodness, the smallest acknowledgement that every one can make, is to take a retrospect of what his resolutions were upon the institution of this season of humiliation, and of what his conduct has since been. If it has been such as his conscience approves, let him devoutly implore of his Maker sufficient strength and constancy, for persevering in the path he has been so fortunate as to adopt. But if the contrary appears, let him not shrink from examining ingenuously the state of his heart, but resolutely persist till he has eradicated all the evil which twines about it, under a full conviction that professions will be useless upon this, as upon all other occasions, without a suitable conduct, and that only both united can make the present Fast beneficial to himself, or acceptable to Heaven.

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At this time in particular, worthy of our attention is what our Redeemer once said concerning the inhabitants of Judea: This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. How astonishing, that a nation so highly favoured should have deserved so flagrant a reproach! Feel we not the utmost abhorrence of their obstinacy and ingratitude? Ought we not therefore to exert ourselves in the most vigorous manner, lest the returns which we make for that complication of blessings which we have experienced from above, should be such as may render this reproach applicable to ourselves?

Let us, by a well-ordered and pious conduct, convince the nations around us that these blessings have not been lavished on our heads in vain. Let every action be influenced by the consideration of our immense obligations to that Benign Providence which extricated this land from that abyss of barbarism and ignorance in which it was formerly overwhelmed, and raised it to that civilized and enlightened state which it has now attained. With a minute and invariable observance of the
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Divine laws, let us unite a steadfast and conscientious attachment to the Sovereign whom it has been pleased to set over us: Nor can we better manifest our gratitude to Heaven; than by making that sublime system of religion, which it has committed to our charge; the principal object of our care. Let the spirit of concord and harmony, so conformable to the dictates of nature and reason, and which that religion recommends with the utmost energy, constantly breathe throughout our intercourse with one another. Let us seriously consider, that a kingdom, no more than a house, divided against itself, can stand; and that union is the strongest and most lasting bond of society. Such indeed is its consequence in our Maker's eyes, that without it, our prayers, we may rest assured, will pass unnoticed, and all our humiliation be of no avail. Let us cultivate it with all our assiduity, and then draw nigh with our complaints to that Great Patron who alone can redress them, in humble confidence, that a broken and a contrite heart he will not despise.

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